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“Black Mountain Poet” Robert Creeley Gives Reading at Lawrence University

Posted on: January 17th, 2005 by Rick Peterson

Robert Creeley, whose unique style featuring concise and emotionally powerful verse has inspired generations of poets, shares his work in a reading at Lawrence University.

Creeley will give a reading of some of his poems Thursday, Jan 27 at 7:30 p.m. in Harper Hall in the Lawrence Music-Drama Center. A reception and book signing will follow.

Raised on a farm in West Acton, Mass., Creeley, 78, has produced an impressive body of work, including nearly 60 published volumes of his poems, a novel and numerous short stories and essays. His first published poem, “Le Fou,” appeared in 1952, but it was 1962’s “For Love: Poems 1950-1960,” a collection of verse in which he explored human relationships and common day events, themes that would become his hallmark, that earned him widespread acclaim.

Among his most recent works is a collection of poems entitled “If I Were Writing This,” (2003) “Just in Time” (2001) and “Life and Death” (2000), in which he examines his own mortality.

Early in his career, Creeley was best known for his association with the “Black Mountain Poets.” The talented group of writers — Robert Duncan, Charles Olson, Ed Dorn and Denise Levertov among them — all had some connection with the experimental North Carolina institution Black Mountain College, which attracted some of the most innovative writers and artists of the 1950s. It was during this period Creeley developed the tenet “form is never more than an extension of content” that would remain central to much of his work throughout his career.

“Creeley is the kind of poet that everyone in the highly-factionalized world of poets and poetry magazines appreciates,” said Faith Barrett, assistant professor of English at Lawrence, who is coordinating Creeley’s visit. “His work appeals to both experimental and mainstream writers and is widely read in university classes. It is a real coup for us to get a poet of his stature to come and share his work.”

Creeley attended Harvard University, but his education was interrupted by World War II. He left school to serve as an ambulance driver in Burma for the American Field Service. After the war, he returned to Harvard, but dropped out during the last semester of his senior year. He eventually earned his bachelor’s degree at Black Mountain College, where he also later taught and served as editor of the literary journal “The Black Mountain Review.”

Creeley’s work has earned him numerous prestigious awards, including two Guggenheim fellowships, both the Poetry Society of America’s Robert Frost Medal and the Shelley Memorial Award and Poetry magazine’s Levinson Prize. In 1987 he was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and served as New York State Poet from 1989-91.

After teaching stints at the University of New Mexico, the University of British Columbia and San Francisco State University, Creeley joined the English department at the State University of New York – Buffalo in 1967, where he taught until 2003. He currently serves as a distinguished professor in English for the graduate program in creative writing at Brown University.

Creeley’s appearance is supported by the Mia T. Paul Poetry Fund. Established in 1998, the endowed fund brings distinguished poets to campus for public readings and to work with students on writing poetry and verse.